

competition in the economic sphere. If this occurs, the long-term measure of success will likely be that of productivity and GDP, not the outmoded conquest of territory.

But even this will not occur, as Pomeranz shows, until Middle Eastern countries overcome the “land constraint” and shift workers from agriculture and the oil fields to urban and industrial occupations. This is possible. One forgets that Iran once had the capacity to do mid-level manufacturing. Jordan is now setting up assembly plants financed by U.S. foreign direct investment. As Greenfeld contends, a modest nationalism will assist this process and motivate a new industrialism.

Pomeranz tells us where it will prevail. Ferguson suggests that in countries in which this process fails and breeds trouble in its wake, the United States can still lead an international coalition to defeat terrorism and spread general economic benefit. The three together offer new perspectives on why economic transformation has been relatively slow in the past but could still speed up in the future—and perhaps without quite the level of social and political breakage that such transformations have often caused in the past. □

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Islamist Bubbles

Martin Kramer

Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, translated by Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2002), 416 pp., \$29.95.

Roland Jacquard, *In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the Bin Laden Brotherhood*, translated by George Holoch (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 293 pp., \$18.95 (paper).

CHRISTOPHER ROSS has been in the news. After September 11, the State Department summoned the former U.S. ambassador to Syria and Algeria back into service as “special coordinator for public diplomacy and public affairs.” On November 3, he appeared on Al-Jazeera satellite channel to present America’s

case—in Arabic. (As one former diplomat put it, “the scuttlebutt around the locker room was always that Chris was the man in terms of being able to wrap significant thoughts in good Arabic.”¹) With his many years of foreign service in Beirut, Damascus, Algiers and Fez, Ross is credited with knowing the currents of Arab opinion, and how best to navigate them.

Consider, then, this prediction Ross made at a conference of public affairs officers from the State Department’s Near Eastern Affairs bureau in September 1993:

I predict, regretfully, that the region is fated to witness a wave of Islamist revolu-

¹Hume Horan, quoted by Eric Boehlert, “A Failure to Communicate”, Salon.com, November 7, 2001.

tions, successful or failed, over the next decade. To me, this is a likelihood with which we must come to grips. The regimes in place lack motivation, a vision for change, and support. The democrats have vision and motivation, but lack support. The Islamists combine all three—motivation, vision, and support. . . . Left to their own devices, the region's discredited regimes are likely to try to muddle through and repress opposition, its budding democrats are likely to fall on their faces, and its extreme Islamists can be expected to become the next agents of change.²

There is still a year to go before the expiry date of this prediction, but the Islamists had better hurry up if it is to come true. In the nine years since Ross gazed into his crystal ball, there has been no wave of Islamist revolutions. There hasn't been even a single one.

To the contrary: the "discredited regimes" of which Ross spoke have pushed the Islamists out of the political arena. They did it in flagrant disregard of Human Rights Watch, but with meticulous regard for the basic axiom of Middle Eastern politics: rule or die. The most dangerous of the Islamists—Osama bin Laden and crowd—found refuge in remote corners of east Africa and south Asia. From there, they did unfurl terrorist tentacles into Europe and America. But Islamists no longer threaten any of the region's rulers. Secretary of State Colin Powell, writing after September 11, announced that Americans and Muslims share "a chilling appreciation of common vulnerability to terrorism."³ This was a politic and sonorous remark, no doubt; but the truth is that no Middle Eastern state except Israel shares America's sense of vulnerability to terrorism. The Arab states solved their terrorism problem by force, notably by expelling Islamists to places like Afghanistan where they became somebody else's problem—above

all, America's.

This is clear in retrospect. It was not clear at the time, and if an experienced Arabist like Ross anticipated Islamist revolutions, what must his less-knowledgeable listeners have concluded? In the media and the journals, a raft of experts beat the same drum: the United States would have to "come to grips" with an inevitable tide of Islamist revolutions, presumably by coddling those Islamists who could not be intimidated or bribed. A cottage industry grew up around this estimate of Islamism, arguing that it could be tamed through engagement, dialogue and, perhaps, selected policy adjustments. It is no small miracle that key Western policymakers never quite bought the theory. If they had, Ross's prediction might have become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

ENTER GILLES Kepel, a French scholar at the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris. Kepel speaks fluent Arabic, acquired during years of residence and research in Egypt. Islamism has always been his forte, demonstrated in two earlier books available in English translation: *Muslim Extremism in Egypt* and *Allah in the West*. In France, Kepel is a media presence: prolific, provocative and photogenic. In the mid-1990s, he revisited Islamism on its own turf, interviewing its proponents and reading its latest texts. In 2000 he published his findings under the eyebrow-raising title *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*. The English translation has a less committal subtitle: *The Trail of Political Islam*. But it is the same book, with the addition of some reflec-

²Christopher Ross, "Political Islam: Myths, Realities, and Policy Implications", speech delivered to the Salzburg Conference of NEA Public Affairs Officers, September 21, 1993.

³Colin L. Powell, "A Long, Hard Campaign", *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001.

tions on September 11. Like the original, it is a superbly written and deeply informed *tour de force*.

Kepel sets out to explain why the dire predictions about Islamism missed the mark. His argument is simple but persuasive. In the generation that followed independence in the Muslim world, education expanded dramatically, extending beyond the nationalist elites. But the ruling establishment, jealous of its powers and privileges, blocked the ambition of new social groups. Islamism is the invention of those who missed out on the post-colonial division of spoils. It is the doctrine of a frustrated intelligentsia, and their license to defy the existing order.

But nowhere have the Islamists ever been numerous enough to seize power from entrenched regimes on their own. So Islamists have turned to two potential allies: the devout bourgeoisie, to provide the means; and the masses of the urban poor, to fill out the ranks. In Iran, these three groups—intelligentsia, middle classes, urban poor—came together in one movement, producing a revolutionary explosion. Everywhere else, Kepel has discovered, at least one of the three crucial elements has been missing—and failure has been inevitable.

The clearest examples of this, covered by Kepel at length, are Algeria and Egypt. A decade ago, the pages of *Foreign Affairs* carried typically grim forecasts of impending Islamist triumphs in both countries. When the Algerian regime aborted the elections that nearly brought Islamists to power in 1991, a frequent contributor, Robin Wright, assured readers that their success had only been delayed. The regime's action was "like the abortive Moscow putsch in 1991; although the process may take longer, it will fail for similar reasons."⁴ When Egypt faced Islamist terror in 1993, Stanley Reed warned readers: "For the United States it is impossible not to com-

pare the current situation in Egypt with the one that led to the disastrous fall of the shah of Iran in 1979."⁵

The Islamists were also very full of themselves. Hadn't they just bested the Soviet superpower in Afghanistan? That victory persuaded multitudes of Islamists that they could dispense with politics altogether. *Jihad* would suffice; God would provide. (They forgot that in Afghanistan it was the CIA and Pakistani intelligence that provided.) The fervor of imminent redemption percolated through their ranks. Power awaited them just beyond the next attack on foreign tourists, the next massacre of pro-regime villagers. In Western capitals, worried diplomats thought so too, and proposed putting out lines to Islamist leaders sooner rather than later.

But the regimes held tight, and the Islamists made a fatal mistake: in their impatience, they escalated their violence in a rash lunge to overturn the status quo. They could not seize the state, so they tried to wrest society away from it. They could not kill rulers and generals, so they killed journalists and artists. They could not legislate the veil, so they enforced it by terror. Each escalation made the Islamists into enemies of the people, so that when the regimes finally mobilized to smite them, no one stood with them in solidarity—not even the pious and poor. They had spilled too much blood, and too much of it Muslim. From the mid-1990s, writes Kepel, "the Islamist movement began to unravel, and the violence hastened its decline."

And what of Osama bin Laden? After September 11, Kepel (and Olivier Roy, author of an earlier book entitled *The Failure of Political Islam*) came under a bar-

⁴Robin Wright, "Islam, Democracy and the West", *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1992), p. 136.

⁵Stanley Reed, "The Battle for Egypt", *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1993), p. 95.

rage of criticism in France. Had they not lulled the West into complacency with their over-optimistic and premature talk of "post-Islamism"? Kepel argues in this book that bin Laden's brand of terrorism arose precisely from the failure of Islamism writ large: Al-Qaeda, driven to the four corners of the globe, struck Manhattan and Washington because it could not touch the Arab regimes it sought to destroy. Kepel has said of his French critics that they either failed to read his book, or read too much into it.

Some American interpreters of Islamism, by the way, have said the same about their pre-September 11 writings. The difference is that Kepel's defense is justified, and theirs is not. The French "post-Islamists" were never starry-eyed about Islamist goals, and never dismissive of the Islamist potential for terror. The American Islamophiles, on the other hand, gave the benefit of the doubt to any and every Islamist, and scoffed at scenarios of mass killing.

THE DEFEAT of Islamist movements inflicted by the rulers of Algeria and Egypt has been duplicated on a smaller scale in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia. Kepel covers them all. Naturally, he dwells at greatest length on the cases that confirm his thesis. The problem is that some cases don't.

There are Islamist movements, positioned at the very jugular of the Middle East, that are not at all spent. In Lebanon,

the Iranian-backed Hizballah has dug itself into Lebanese politics and society, and its militiamen still parade with guns, having compelled Israel to withdraw from



A solicitous Yasir Arafat pays a visit to Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, leader of Hamas, in October 1997.

south Lebanon after an 18-year occupation. And from the Palestinian-controlled cities of the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas and Islamic Jihad dispatch waves of suicide bombers and openly take credit for their deeds. These movements still believe that a determined minority can change the course of history—the few thousand Shi'a guerrillas who hunted the Israeli army in Lebanon, and the one hundred Palestinians who have chosen "self-martyrdom."

These movements flourish not because they have forged a broad social coalition. Hizballah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as much as they serve their own followings, mainly serve the interests of certain regimes. Syria has allotted space to Hizballah because its objective of bleeding Israel coincides with the aims of Damascus. Needless to say, there is no active Islamist movement in Syria itself—the Ba'ath regime would never allow it. But Hizballah's young leader, Seyyid Nasrallah, and Syria's young president have become boon companions as they chart a common strategy. There is also room in Damascus for Ramadan Shallah, formerly of the University of South Florida, currently the leader of Islamic Jihad. Likewise, the Palestinian Authority has used Hamas and Islamic Jihad as levers against Israel. It was Arafat himself who extricated the quadriplegic Sheikh Ahmad Yasin from an Israeli

prison, restoring him as leader of Hamas. And Islamist terrorism has become the essence of the so-called Al-Aqsa *intifada*, which Yasir Arafat is unwilling to end until he can emerge from the fire with a convincing V-sign raised on high.

The point is that these Islamist movements thrive because they are *not* “in opposition.” They are proxies of regimes in a common struggle against Israel. Decline or not, there will always be space for movements that are prepared to delay confrontation and serve rulers. Such alliances offer Islamists an opening for turning national causes into full-blown holy wars. Kepel devotes a chapter to the failure of the Islamist international to turn Bosnia into an Islamist cause. But Islamists have had undeniable success in recasting the struggles for Palestine and Kashmir into *jihads*. This may not bring them to power anytime soon, but it is a safe port in a storm, and it aids prudent preparation for another bid for power in the future. In the meantime, states are more than willing to exploit the Islamist sword, especially where they hesitate to wield their own. The regular forces can lounge in their barracks while the zealots do the work.

Kepel is unconvinced. “The Islamist movement will have much difficulty reversing its trail of decline as it confronts 21st century civilization”, he writes. “Muslims no longer view Islamism as the source of utopia, and this more pragmatic vision augurs well for the future.” And here is an influential echo: Robert Kaplan, who has made his name by anticipating the worst, now predicts that “the new century will ultimately see the implosion of political Islam.” Implosion, of course, is much more dramatic than decline, and would almost certainly require that Iran discard its revolution—something Kaplan believes is likely.⁶ This is Kepel’s argument drawn to its furthest conclusion, and it takes some boldness to make it.

But there is another view, spelled out in “Global Trends 2015”, a report published in 2000 by the National Intelligence Council, representing the considered opinion of the CIA and “non-government” experts (including Joseph Nye and, at the time, Richard Haass). The report, after surveying the Middle East’s grim combination of growing populations and economic failures, concludes that, by 2015, “populations will be significantly larger, poorer, more urban, and more disillusioned.” As a result, Islamism will remain very much in play:

Popular resentment of globalization as a Western intrusion will be widespread. Political Islam in various forms will be an attractive alternative for millions of Muslims throughout the region, and some radical variants will continue to be divisive social and political forces.⁷

The report goes on to predict this: “Islamists could come to power in states that are beginning to become pluralist and in which entrenched secular elites have lost their appeal.”⁸

If you had to bet the family farm—or the country’s tallest skyscraper—on one of these predictions, which would you choose? Is Islamism like a harmless soap bubble, destined to pop in a shimmer of disappearing incandescence? Or is it the kind of bubble that will explode like a gas pocket suddenly exposed to a flame? Kepel’s prediction is predicated on a fundamentally optimistic assessment: Muslims, having exhausted all other alternatives, will do the right thing. “As

⁶Robert D. Kaplan, “The World in 2005”, *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 2002).

⁷National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Nongovernment Experts*, NIC2000-02 (December 2000), p. 70.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 71.

Muslim societies emerge from the Islamist era", he writes, "it is through openness to the world and to democracy that they will construct their future. There is no longer any real alternative." But can we be sure that "democracy" will not bring the Islamist movement back from the shadows? Do we know that, in the absence of a strong state, the prospects for democracy outweigh those of Balkan-style breakdown? Are you out of government? If you answer yes to these three questions, then place your bet with Kepel.

PRESUMABLY AT some moment before 2015, Osama bin Laden will resurface, dead or alive. In the meantime, books about him are easier to find. The entry by Roland Jacquard, president of the Paris-based International Observatory on Terrorism, is an updated version of a book originally published in French, during the very week of September 11.

Like previous books on bin Laden, this one belongs to the gray genre of the intelligence compendium. In a study of this kind, every bit of information is thrown into a mixer: original documents, press reports, intelligence leaks. Such books can almost write themselves, although readers are advised not to delve too deeply into the footnotes; this is a kitchen that will spoil your appetite.

That said, Jacquard writes a smooth narrative, navigating the familiar chapters in bin Laden's biography—the family business, the *jihad* years in Afghanistan, the creation of Al-Qaeda. To the extent anyone can tell from unclassified sources, his account is broadly accurate. But shame on the publisher for padding this book with one hundred pages of poorly reproduced "original" documents in Arabic (and French), whose English "translations" on opposing pages are hopelessly inadequate, even as summations. Better versions could have been plucked from

the Internet. This is all the more inexplicable as the "consulting editor" listed on the title page is an Egyptian-born instructor of Arabic at Duke. (Her afterword, telling us that Islam is not bin Laden and bin Laden is not Islam, is a miniature sample of the pap offered by countless academics. Moreover, it contradicts Jacquard's own argument that bin Laden's "brotherhood" is everywhere, that he has "countless" followers, and that Al-Qaeda will outlast him.)

Jacquard is no academic. But let the truth be told: the terrorism experts, whom the professors hold in such low esteem, who mangle Arabic documents and assign equal weight to rumor and fact, actually have a better track record than any combination of academic Arabists. If anyone can be said to have imagined an event on the scale of September 11, it was the terrorism experts—Jacquard included. The reason is that they took Islamists at their word. And so it behooves readers to heed Jacquard's (ominously numbered) Chapter 13: "Jihad's New Weapons." Islamism may have crested; it may even be headed toward "implosion." But a fervent remnant, however small, will soldier on with one purpose: to outdo the murderous performance of September 11. Don't be deceived by the ease of the Afghan victory, warns Jacquard: "This brand of terrorism still has networks around the world, mysterious financial power, and no doubt new leaders lurking in the shadows. The threat remains intact." Extreme Islamists are already obsessed with the chemical, the biological, and the nuclear. Henceforth, the United States will be left with no choice but to wage continuous war against every last redoubt of extreme Islamism.

Clash of civilizations? That would take two, and it would not be an even contest. But there can be no doubt that the United States will have its hands full in lopping off the heads of Al-Qaeda as they grow back, and that the playing field

is more level than most Americans imagine. "We no longer believe in the great powers", bin Laden told Jacquard in answer to a question he submitted a year ago. "Our conviction is that America is much weaker than Russia." For the Islamists, it is the United States that is in decline (along with Israel), and if Muslims by the thousands are willing to do battle as "self-martyrs" with the "right" weapons, victory will be theirs. One can

only hope that September 11 is what Kepel makes it out to be: the end of an era. But one is left with the uneasy feeling that Jacquard may be right; that we are only at the beginning. □

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Wasserstein's Jerusalem

Yossi Klein Halevi

Bernard Wasserstein, *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 432 pp., \$29.95.

BERNARD Wasserstein is driven by an obsessive commitment to symmetry. His title, *Divided Jerusalem*, refers not merely to the reality of a city torn between two estranged national and religious communities, but to the moral and historical claims that reinforce that separation. Wasserstein divides these two elements of Jerusalem's division into balanced equations, priding himself on fairness. Indeed, dispassion is his passion. Yet, in his ideological commitment to balancing the centrality of Jerusalem for the

Jewish people with the often ambivalent relationship of Islam and Christianity toward the holy city, he transforms a virtue into a distortion. *Divided Jerusalem* is an inadvertent warning against false evenhandedness—a curse with which the Middle East conflict, often reduced by outsiders to a "cycle of violence", is routinely afflicted.

Along with a symmetry of claims, Wasserstein posits a symmetry of ambivalence: All three monotheistic faiths, he insists, not only venerate Jerusalem but, at various points, have downplayed, disparaged and even despised the holy city. And so he begins his narrative—which focuses mainly on the role of international diplomacy in determining the city's fate—with contradictory historical voices about